

7. Interview with Author Davide Cali

What gave you the idea for *The Bear with the Sword*?

Often we accuse somebody or something for things which happen to us. I think this is quite stupid. We're responsible for ourselves, for what we do, and everything we do has got some consequence. When a flood destroys thousands of houses we talk about nature out of control which kills people, but we never consider that, maybe, we too are responsible about this. When things happen we prefer to find an enemy to fight against but most of the times our worst enemy is... just us.

Why did you choose to tell the story with animals rather than people? Is the pigdeer a product of your own imagination?

Well, actually, at first the bear was a human warrior. My Italian publisher asked me to convert him into an animal (because the theme of the book was quite heavy so we needed something to make it easier) and he chose the bear. Then I transformed all the humans into animals. I like animals, when I was a kid I was a little expert about them. My favourites are always the most strange ones. The pigdeer lives in Malaysia, it's a kind of pork and I chose it because I liked how it sounded in Italian: *babirusa* (quite similar to its Malaysian name *babirusa*; baby=pig, rusa=deer).

What kind of collaboration did you have with the illustrator, Gianluca Foli?

As often happens, there was no real collaboration. I meet most of my illustrators after having done the book. So was the art director Cristiana Valentini to work with me both. When I met Gianluca I was surprised to discover that we are very alike, we both have a great passion for animals, we both love sushi and make it at home, we both hate football. Somebody could say we're twins!

I have to say that the first time I saw Gianluca's work in advertising, I didn't like it. His work was interesting but, I thought, not for me and especially not for that book. So I was particularly surprised when I saw the complete book. After having seen some pictures realized by Gianluca for children's press, I wrote especially for him a new story. I think we'll start to work on it next year. It will be, again, a very strong theme on which I wanted to work since long time.

Often your stories have powerful messages. What messages do you hope children take from this book?

As I told, we all are responsible of what we do and so of what happens to us. I think it's a simple and good message to grow with.

It seems you like to make children (and their parents and teachers) think about the world they live in. How hard is it to both make them think but also produce a story that is entertaining?

Not so hard. Anyway I can't do anything different. It's my way to write books. I like to tell stories as life is, so in life everything is mixed: nice and bad days, love and death, war and happiness. I like to tell amusing stories but in each of them I love to put many elements. In real life doesn't exist love or fun or melancholy, separated from the rest of things. In everything there's a part of everything else.

What children's authors do you admire most? Who inspires you?

Many ones. I loved the stories by Saki and Roald Dahl and I enjoyed very much also some Italian author like Gianni Rodari and Silvana Gandolfi. As I was at first illustrator and cartoonist too (now I'm doing most the writer that anything else) also many illustrators (like Satoshi Kitamura, Tomi Ungerer, Beatrice Alemagna, Tony Ross) and comics authors (Andrea Pazienza, José Parrondo, Charles Schulz, Lewis Trondheim) inspired me. Also many adults writer inspired me. I loved the books by Italo Calvino, Stefano Benni, Jack Ritchie and many ones.

Then I like rock music, cooking and movies. Everything I like is, or will be, part of my stories someday. The Natural Museum of Science I was used to visit when I was kid in Genoa is in one of my first French books, *Bernard et moi*, which tells also the life of me and my girlfriend. In *J'aime t'embrasser* I realized a personal diary of our love for our anniversary (10 years together).

And then: the kid protagonist in *Piano Piano* really exists, and I wrote a story about sushi (my favourite food) and I'm going to put the gothic imaginary of my best favourite rock band, The Smashing Pumpkins in one of my next books. My latest comics album, *Dix petits insectes* (published this year by Sarbacane) mixed my passion for insects and my favourite roman by Agatha Christie: *Ten Little Indians*.

What are you working on next? Would you like to work with an Australian illustrator one day?

I always work on many projects at the same time. So now I'm working on two comics album for kids and on a big comics album for all readers. They'll be published in France (for Sarbacane) in 2010 and 2011.

In France I'm doing also other two, maybe three books. I'm trying to make a book in USA too. At the same time I'm working in Italy on a book which will be published this year by Zoolibri. I think I'll meet soon my Italian publisher to discuss our next two books.

So, what else? I'm thinking about books and comics ready to be published in 2011, 2012. It's a quite strange work, we all have always to think to future with large advance.

I left the Italian magazine I worked for 14 years last years and now I'm doing comics on a French monthly magazine for kids (*Mes Premiers J'aime Lire*, published by Bayard) and I have many other comics projects for magazines. I left Genoa last summer, now I live in the countryside. Since some month I got a rock band. I play the electric guitar. I hope to show you our song on www.youtube.com, very soon.

About an Australian illustrator, why not? I don't know their work at all, so everybody could be interested in working with me can contact me by my website. On the other side, if you already got somebody you would like to work with on my text, we can talk about it. The country where I work better is France, as you know, but I would like to work in Japan and Usa too, and then Germany, Korea and, why not, Australia. I find interesting the idea to work with many different people in many countries. I know it's quite difficult, we have different cultures and different ways to make books, but to find the way to work together could be a nice challenge.